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Dear Shanta Devarajan,

Re: Quiet Corruption Report

I was very concerned to see the messaging in the latest African Development Indicators report.

Language such as 'quiet corruption' feeds the misperception that health and education services are failing because of lazy doctors or absent teachers, when in fact these are symptoms of the problem, not the cause.

The report neglects to recognise the incredible contribution made by millions of such workers around the world, often for very low pay, and in some cases in very dangerous conditions. As a recent paper published by UNICEF stressed, frontline teachers and health workers in many developing countries have seen their salaries decline in real terms in last couple of years, due to the financial crisis. Many now risk of falling into poverty.

As Oxfam has often pointed out, the failures to achieve universal access to health and education are primarily due to lack of investment by governments and the international community in publicly financed and delivered health systems.

The message is particularly unhelpful at a time when the rest of the international community is attempting to build consensus on the urgency of investing in a scaling-up of the health workforce, and in decent working conditions. This is why we urge the Bank to approach the causes of the problem more constructively, by also investing in research into successful publicly financed and delivered health systems, and to work with governments to ensure living wages, and incentives to work in remote areas.

While we welcome the emphasis that this report places on accountability, we are very concerned that the message contributes to the impression that the failure to reach the MDGs is the fault of teachers and nurses, rather than of governments and donors, including the World Bank.

Yours sincerely,


Barbara Stocking
Chief Executive, Oxfam GB